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ABSTRACT

The Hunter-Grundin Literacy Profiles are a set of five different tasks for assessing the language and reading development of children from six and one-half to eight years of age. The Profiles are based on the findings of an earlier study of spoken language and reading development of young children, which found significant success in reading development with the use of a curriculum that used language game activities and systematic record keeping. The Profiles are designed for use with such a curriculum and use "play-like" activities to provide a standardized battery of tests. Four group tests assess attitude to reading, reading for meaning, spelling, and free writing; an individually administered test assesses spoken language. Testing time for a class of 30 pupils is three hours, compared to 15 hours for entirely individualized testing. The tests are to be used in combination with informal assessment as a basis for diagnostic teaching. (DF)

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MONITORING EARLY LITERACY: THE HUNTER-GRUNDIN PROFILES

Paper presented to the 4th Annual Conference of the Reading Association of Ireland, St.Patrick's College, Dublin, 13-15th September 1979

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Background: the Bullock Report

The crucial role of monitoring in the field of language and literacy was highlighted in what was probably the major British educational report of the 1970s, 'A Language for Life' (HMSO 1975), more generally known as the Bullock Report. This was the outcome of work carried out by a committee of inquiry set up in 1972, shortly after the publication of the NFER report 'The Trend of Reading Standards'. In stating the Bullock Committee's terms of reference, it was pointed out that

> "reading was not singled out for special attention but was placed in close association with other language skills within the context of teaching the use of English."

It is useful to remind ourselves of these terms of reference, since they serve as a definition of the main problems facing all those concerned with education in the field of language and literacy:

> "To consider in relation to schools:
>
> (a) all aspects of teaching the use of English, including reading, writing and speech;
>
> (b) how present practice may be improved and the role that initial and in-service training might play;
>
> (c) to what extent arrangements for monitoring the general level of attainment in these skills can be introduced or improved;
>
> and to make recommendations."

The Bullock Report includes 333 recommendations, of which 17 were listed as 'principal recommendations'. The first three of the principal recommendations are:

> "1. A system of monitoring should be introduced which will employ new instruments to assess a wider range of attainments than has been attempted in the past and allow new criteria to be established for the definition of literacy.
>
> 2. There should be positive steps to develop the language ability of children in the pre-school and nursery and infant years. - - - -
>
> 3. Every school should devise a systematic policy for the development of reading competence in pupils of all ages and ability levels."

Work on new assessment instruments of the kind called for in the first of the recommendations quoted is currently being carried out by the DES Assessment of Performance Unit (APU). However, the work of the APU is focused on the secondary age range and

the upper end of the primary age range. This means that we cannot expect any instruments for the monitoring of language and literacy development during the early school years to be forthcoming from the APU.

An infant curriculum research project

In 1973, one of the present authors, Elizabeth Hunter-Grundin, began a research project in the field of spoken language and reading development within the infant school. This project involved the development and implementation of new elements of infant school curriculum, which were evaluated by means of a new set of tests for the monitoring of individual progress, tests which were fully developed within the project. The importance of the focus of this research project was endorsed through several of the recommendations published in the Bullock Report in 1975.

As part of its systematic and structured approach to language and reading in the infant school, the experimental curriculum in the Hunter-Grundin study involved the extensive use of language games, which have the aim of providing the children with additional experience in such uses of language which are particularly important in school. The objectives for language development underpinning these language games were practically identical with the objectives listed in the Bullock Report, namely to use language for:

"1 Reporting on present and recalled experiences
2 Collaborating towards agreed ends
3 Projecting into the future; anticipating and predicting
4 Projecting and comparing possible alternatives
5 Perceiving causal and dependent relationships
6 Giving explanations of how and why things happen
7 Expressing and recognising tentativeness
8 Dealing with problems in the imagination and seeing possible solutions
9 Creating experiences through the use of imagination
10 Justifying behaviour
11 Reflecting on feelings, their own and other people's."

(DES 1975, p 67)

Most of the language games used in the Hunter-Grundin study had originally been developed by a group of London headteachers and teachers meeting at the Inner London Education Authority's Centre for Urban Educational Studies (CUES). All the games are ~~taxbe~~ played by groups of two, three of four children. In the

first instance, each game is taught to small groups of children by the teacher, who also uses the occasion to introduce appropriate new vocabulary to be used in the game. Once a small group of children has been taught a game, and has practised playing it together with the teacher for a while, the group can play the game with only partial or intermittent supervision by the teacher. An audio-cassette player is required for some of the games, but the handling of this piece of equipment can also be left to the children themselves.

Some of the language games involve series of picture cards, which can be interpreted in a number of different ways, thus stimulating the children to tell a variety of stories and to discuss the merits of each story . Other games use boards with many alternative routes, where the children have to find out which is the right route by asking questions which can be answered by 'yes' or 'no'. In some cases the children are given individual booklets where each page shows a number of options for a particular phase in, for example, the 'construction of a mechanical monster'. The children are asked to try to reach consensus by discussing the various options.

A detailed account of the research project, and a full description of the games used in the experimental curriculum are given in Hunter-Grundin (1979a). A series of videotapes showing groups of children playing the language games has also been published recently (Hunter-Grundin 1979b). The results of tests given when the experimental and control children were ready to transfer to junior school showed that the experimental curriculum using language games and systematic record keeping (another important feature in the curriculum) was highly successful with regard to the children's reading development. All children seemed to benefit from the experimental curriculum, but the 'working class' pupils in the experimental school made particularly good progress during the two infant school years. *)

*) For this research Elizabeth Hunter-Grundin was awarded the 1979 Institute for Reading Research Fellowship by the International Reading Association for outstanding contribution to reading research outside North America.

Developing the Hunter-Grundin Profiles

During the pilot studies for the Hunter-Grundin research project, it became clear that instruments suitable for the assessment of the language and reading development of top infants (at the age of about seven years) were not available, but had to be developed especially for this project.

A number of word recognition tests were available, but in a curriculum where the emphasis is on reading for meaning, testing the ability to read isolated words cannot be considered a suitable task for the assessment of reading ability. Another important consideration in the selection or development of suitable assessment instruments was the time needed to carry out the testing. In order to avoid all sorts of 'test anxiety', it is important that the tasks given to young children are such that they can be completed within a short period of time. It is also important that all children should be able to 'have a go' at the test tasks, even if their ability is not very well developed.

Since the curriculum for language and reading was to a large extent based on games, i.e. activities which the children could enjoy as much as all the other play activities in the infant school curriculum, it was furthermore desirable that the instruments used for the purpose of assessing the children's progress should be pleasant 'play-like' activities. Clearly, not all tasks in a battery for the assessment of language and reading skills can be equally pleasurable, but it should be possible to ensure that each child finds at least some of the tasks pleasurable. It seems particularly important that the first task with which the children are confronted is one which all children find easy to understand and pleasant to perform.

Assessment instruments that could satisfy these criteria were developed and used in the Hunter-Grundin research project. The reactions - from both children and teachers - to these instruments were so positive that it was later decided to develop the instruments further with a view to providing a standardized battery of tests for the assessment of early literacy in the age range 6½ to 8 years.

The resulting battery, The Hunter-Grundin Literacy Profiles, consists of five different tasks, none of which takes more

than 10 minutes to administer, and which the vast majority of children enjoy doing - even if their ability level is quite low. The battery consists of four group test tasks, assessing

attitude to reading;
reading for meaning;
spelling;
free writing;

and one individual test task assessing

spoken language.

The fact that four of the five tests are group tests means that the total amount of time the class teacher has to spend administering the tests to her class, can be kept to a minimum. Assuming that the group tests are given to about 15 children at a time (i.e. half a class), the whole battery can be given to a class of 30 children with an 'expenditure' of teacher time of not more than five hours. If the group tests are given to the entire class of 30 at the same time, the total amount of teacher time needed is less than three hours. Predominantly individual testing is, by comparison, quite time-consuming. For example, an individual test that takes 30 minutes per pupil, including instructions, demands a total input of teacher time of <u>fifteen hours</u> for a class of 30 children.

The different tasks in the battery are described briefly in the following.

<u>Attitude test</u>

The purpose of this task is to assess the children's attitude to reading as an activity, compared to a selection of other activities that most children will be familiar with, such as 'eating ice cream', 'playing in the playground' and 'having your hair washed'. The children are asked to indicate their liking or 'disliking' through marking one out of five 'funny faces'. The faces express , in a stylized way, various degrees of liking/disliking, ranging from 'like very much', symbolized by a very 'happy' face, to 'dislike very much', symbolized by a very 'unhappy' face.

This attitude task has proved both simple and enjoyable for children of all ability levels. As such it is an almost ideal

task with which to start a test battery, since it helps to make practically all children confident and 'at ease' in the test situation.

The attitude scale based on five 'funny faces' is also used at the end of each of the subsequent group tests, in that the children are asked to indicate how much they like (or dislike) doing each particular task.

Reading for Meaning Scale

This is the most important test in the battery, since it assesses the ability to read for meaning which is crucial to the development of literacy. It is a multiple-choice cloze procedure test, i.e. instead of the deletions only as in conventional cloze tests, there are four alternative words from which the children has to choose one. The use of multiple-choice items eliminates the influence of writing ability on the reading test result. In a conventional cloze test a child may know the right word, but may be unable to write it in an intelligible form. Or he may be able to write the words, but the writing may be so timeconsuming and tiring that it affects his reading score negatively.

The Reading for Meaning Scale can thus be said to constitute a more 'pure' test of reading ability at this age level (6½ to 8 years) than conventional cloze tests. However, like all cloze tests, it puts the emphasis on the ability to understand meaningful written language. It correlates highly with other published reading tests for this age range, most of which are individual tests and therefore much more timeconsuming to administer to a whole class. For example, the correlation with the Neale Analysis of Reading Ability is 0.87.

The Reading for Meaning Scale is also the most important part of the battery in another sense: it is the only test in the battery that can be used on its own as a measure of children's progress towards literacy. Clearly, it is desirable that progress should be assessed in a wide spectrum of skills, but if it is felt that the time or resources are very limited, one test of the ability to read for meaning seems a good alternative to using the entire battery.

Spelling Scale

This is a group test which assesses children's ability to spell common English words in a situation where the words are defined, not only by the way they sound when dictated but also by the context of the story in which they appear. A story is printed on the children's test sheets with a number of words missing. The teacher reads the whole story, including the missing words, aloud, and stops after each missing word to let the children fill in that word.

There are differences of opinion with regard to the emphasis that should be put on correct spelling in children's writing at the infant school level. It is therefore worth noting that to use a standardized spelling test does not necessarily imply that one puts an undue emphasis on correct spelling, or that one favours formal spelling exercises for children with poor spelling results. Spelling can - and, in our opinion, should - be assessed as an integral part of basic literacy, realizing that poor spelling may be a symptom of a generally poor language and literacy development. If this is the case, meaningful reading and writing activities are likely to have much better effect on spelling ability than isolated spelling exercises.

Free Writing Scale

The children are asked to write about their 'way to school', about what they see - or might see, - about what happens - or what could happen. The topic 'On the Way to School' is chosen because it is a meaningful topic for virtually all children. It may not appeal to the imagination as much as other possible topics for young children's free writing, but it has the great advantage of giving all children fairly 'equal opportunity' to to show their writing ability.

The teacher is asked to rate each child's writing in terms of legibility, fluency, accuracy and originality, using a five point scale, A - E, for each rating. In order to make it possible for the teacher to judge how the writing of her pupils compares to a large, representative sample of pupils at this stage, typical examples of writing at five different ability levels are reproduced in the Reference Book.

Spoken Language Scale

This is the only part of the battery that has to be administered individually to one child at a time. The child is shown a large picture of children playing in an adventure playground, and is asked to tell 'what is going on in the picture'. The child is given ample time, and is prompted to go on describing the picture as long as the teacher feels he/she has something more to say, but the teacher gives no hints or 'leads' as to how the picture might be described.

The teacher is asked to rate the child's response to the picture in terms of confidence, enunciation, vocabulary, accuracy and imagination, using the same five point scale as in the free writing task. Detailed instructions for the ratings are given in the Reference Book, together with transcipts of typical responses to this spoken language task from children at different ability levels.

Standardization of the Profiles

The Hunter-Grundin Literacy Profiles Level One have been standardized for top infants and first year junior school pupils in England, Scotland and Wales. Over 70 schools from 23 different local education authorities participated in the standardization. The schools represent inner-city and suburban as well as small town and rural areas, and they cover a wide socio-economic range, from EPA (Educational Priority Area) schools, some of which have more than 50 per cent immigrant children, to schools in areas with almost exclusively 'middle class' homes.

Data from the standardization sample have been used to calculate norms for the Reading for Meaning and the Spelling scales, which allow the conversion of the test score (number of right answers) to a standard score which takes the child's age into account. The Reading for Meaning scores can also be converted to 'reading ages' within the range 6 years 0 months - 9 years 0 months.

Details about the standardization, descriptions of the tests and instructions for their administration etc. are given in the 'Reference Book' (Hunter-Grundin & Grundin 1979).

Combining informal and formal assessment

Assessment and monitoring of individual children's progress is an intrinsic part of good teaching. Assessment results can be used for the purpose of judging whether our schools are 'doing their job' properly, or whether 'standards' are improving or declining. In other words, assessment results can be used for external monitoring of the schools on behalf of educational authorities, parents or other interest groups. The most important use of assessment in schools is, however, in our opinion that which can be described as internal monitoring, i.e. the teachers' own monitoring of their and their pupils' work, with the aim of guiding future work.

This kind of assessment as part of the teaching process has recently been emphasized by HM Inspectors of Schools in their survey of primary education in England (DES 1978), which states:

> "It is vital that teachers should be knowledgeable in what they teach; it is just as necessary that they should be able to assess the performance of their pupils in terms of what they next need to be taught." (op.cit., p.123)

The teacher's assessment can to a great extent be informal, based on her own judgment and experience and her knowledge about the individual children in her care. This informal assessment is usually sufficient to establish whether or not the children are steadily progressing towards literacy, but it may not tell how far they have progressed in comparison to children in other classes and other schools. In order to establish that some kind of formal assessment is needed, using standardized procedures or instruments.

The Hunter-Grundin Literacy Profiles have been developed as a complement to the informal, continuous assessment that every good teacher carries out as part of her teaching job. The formal assessment through the Profiles can provide her with a valuable 'second opinion', and it makes it possible for her to see the performance of her pupils in the right perspective. The combination of informal and formal assessment should provide a good basis for diagnostic teaching.

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